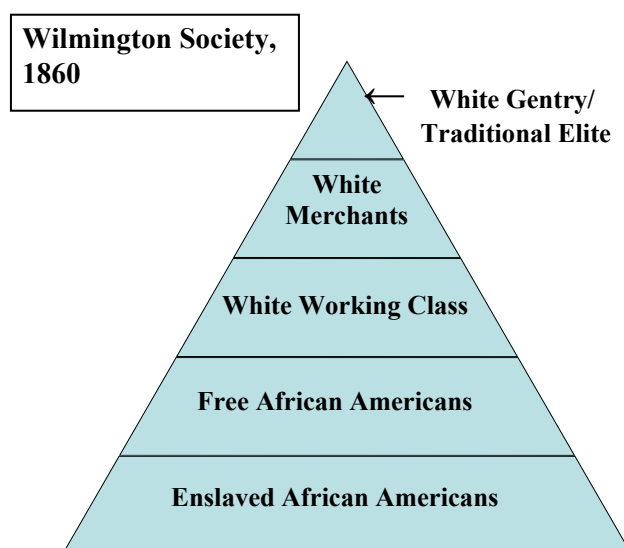


Few of New Hanover's slaveholders fell into the category. Of the 938 slaveholders in the county in 1860, only 145 owned 25 or more slaves whereas 593 owned fewer than 10 slaves. New Hanover's slave population was the tenth largest in the state with a total of 7,103 slaves whereas the state's average county slave population was around 3,800.<sup>13</sup>



Next on the socioeconomic scale were the merchants and businessmen of the city. Before the Civil War, some of Wilmington's white businessmen were more financially secure than their counterparts in

the traditional planter class.<sup>14</sup> Some of the wealthiest merchants were recent immigrants to the city from New England or abroad.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the successful businesses that served the needs of the Wilmington area, wholesale businesses prospered because goods arriving on ships could quickly be delivered inland by rail or inland shipping lines. Commission merchants prospered as they traded with interests in other markets nationally and internationally to sell naval stores, cotton, and rice on behalf of planters.<sup>16</sup> The merchants owned property in town and the countryside with slaves to work for them. Although many were as wealthy as the traditional aristocracy, the two groups were often at odds with each other socially, politically, and economically.<sup>17</sup> Some of the leading businessmen were immigrants who worked in retail trades. Wilmington historians have noted that these successful immigrant businessmen were mostly of German background and that their success was due to their ability to adapt to changes

<sup>13</sup> Slave populations of the ten largest slaveholding counties in 1860 were Granville 11,086; Wake 10,733; Warren 10,401; Halifax 10,349; Edgecombe 10,108; Caswell 9,355; Pitt 8,473; Bertie 8,185; Duplin 7,124; and New Hanover 7,103. Regarding New Hanover slaveholding patterns in 1860, most slaveholders owned only a few slaves: of the 938 slaveholders in New Hanover, 593 owned fewer than 10 slaves, equaling 2,431 of the county's total slave population. Historical Census Browser. Retrieved 1/5/2005, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcens/us/index.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Merchant wealth was tied to assets that could be liquidated whereas planter wealth was tied to seasonal crop production and to the ownership of land and slaves. Planters and farmers were also indebted to merchants who would extend credit for purchases until crops were sold. Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 106-109, 117-123; Sprunt, *Chronicles of the Cape Fear*, 167-168.

<sup>15</sup> A survey of the 1860 census reveals that many of the city's merchants were born in northern states such as Rhode Island, Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, or Pennsylvania. These merchants were financially secure; as a representative example, one merchant from New York reported that his real estate was valued at \$35,000 and his personal property was valued at \$45,000.

<sup>16</sup> According to one business directory, there were approximately 30 major commission merchants working in Wilmington in 1854. Fonvielle, *Wilmington Campaign*, 14; *The Southern Business Directory and General Commercial Advertiser* (Charleston: Walker and James, 1854), 397-399.

<sup>17</sup> Evans, *Ballots and Fence Rails*, 122-23.